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3/2/94

Abomination

No religion justifies the slaying of human beings while they are praying. More than helpless and unsuspecting, Hebron's victims last Friday had prostrated themselves before God, the God of Moses and Jesus, as well as Muhammad.

Abomination is the only way to characterize the bloody act and the claim, made by his brother racists, that the gunman was a holy man, further sanctified by cutting down dozens whose only sin, even in his eyes, was their Palestinian identity. Nazis employed the identical standard for sending men, women and children into gas ovens.

Was anybody really surprised the mosque mass murderer was an American? He was the natural product of the segment of this society that cherishes the gun as the ultimate answer to all life's social problems and personal conflicts.

In today's Israel, U.S. immigrants make up the hard-core of extremist groups; from their ranks came the cowards who blew the legs off Arab mayors a few years ago. More recently, another transplanted New Yorker staged a one-man assault on Jerusalem's sacred Mount because Muslims continue to pray in their own shrine there, as they have for hundreds of years.

Under no circumstances should Jews in general and Israelis particularly be held accountable for the ignominious desecration Dr. Baruch Goldstein committed against the basic tenets of the Hebrew faith. The same absolution cannot be invoked for his fellow fanatics, many of whom live in today's Hebron.

Nor can excuse be made for the performance of the government that arms the fanatics with fully automatic weapons, supposedly for self-defense. Doesn't Israel have a large and celebrated military establishment and several national police forces?

It is terrible enough that the army cuts down Palestinian rock-throwers, many of them youths. The number of casualties caused by solders' indiscriminate shooting would be reason for a major scandal in any other country. However, at least their officers, generally speaking, attempt to exercise some control.

The so-called settlers, sometimes directly assisted by the infamous border police, have long waged a campaign of degradation and intimidation against all Arabs, Christians as well as Muslims. They mean to convert the West Bank into a vast wasteland, to be filled solely by those whom they approve.

In the only arena of public relations that matters to Israel, the United States, the campaign was accompanied by a propaganda drive to convince Americans all Palestinians were ignorant, blood-thirsty savages, no better than the sneaking Indians in those old black and white movies and no more human.

The propaganda remains necessary to rationalize the on-going process of eliminating Arabs, a process that intensified in the wake of Hebron's tragedy. At this writing, the most recently reported victims were a 65-year-old and a lawyer whose age was given as 25. The justification for their deaths was not given.

Every journalist who reports on the Middle East has undergone deliberate efforts to influence and embarrass him into writing only that which Jewish extremists consider acceptable. Anyone who attempts to put a human face on Muslims can expect to be targeted for vicious, distorting attack, accompanied by loud charges of anti-semitism.

The result has been an atmosphere that permits Israel to call itself a democracy while practicing, for example, the clearly contradictory detention and imprisonment policy inherited from the British occupation era. At latest count, without benefit of legal counsel or even formal charges, some 10,000 Palestinians are being held in what amounts to concentration camps, sometimes for years.

Given the world's acceptance of that massive rape of civil rights, is it any wonder Hebron's mosque could be turned into a slaughterhouse last Friday morning, followed the next days by more Arab blood in the streets?

The only good news that comes out of this most recent tragedy appears to be a renewed White House urgency to implement the peace accords agreed to by negotiators in Norway last year. Of course, terms acceptable only one week ago would now trigger fresh rioting.

Yitzhak Rabin had it right when he told the settlers: "You placed yourself outside the wall of Jewish law. You are a shame on Zionism and an embarrassment to Judaism." The prime minister's next move must redress the wrongs committed in his nation's past.

Like it or not, Israel will now have to accept some international presence in the territories it has illegally occupied since their successful 1967 conquest.

Like it or not, serious curbs will have to be installed on those fanatic settlers even their fellow Israelis call "the crazy ones," who spawned and supported the murderous Baruch Goldstein.

Like it or not, Americans must accept their responsibility for putting in continuous peril the lives of human beings in the occupied territories. Hebron's blood stains our hands.